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Egypt a Wake Up Call for US Empire

By Kevin B. Zeese

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Egypt is an alarm that highlights the urgent need for change in U.S. foreign policy. It provides President Obama an opportunity to transform a foreign policy that has often [had the opposite effect](#) that was sought and is undermining U.S. economic and national security.

The list of recent policy failures in the Middle East is quite astounding:

The Iraq War, intended to create a western style democracy and a base of operations for the U.S. in the region has weakened U.S. influence. U.S. military vulnerability to local resistance fighters was exposed. A wide range of abuses of civilians were reported. Perhaps the most damaging were the indelible mark left from the images of Americans torturing Iraqis. The war put in place a Shi'a government that is closely allied with Iran. The war and occupation have weakened U.S. economic security [by costing \\$3 trillion](#), much of which will be spent over the next decade taking care of injured soldiers.

The U.S. has escalated the war in Afghanistan where once again local insurgents are holding the world's only super power at bay, and according to some reports defeating the U.S. military. Last year saw increasing civilian and military casualties and [2011 is expected to be worse](#). The Afghan war-quagmire has the U.S. spending [\\$1 million per year to keep each soldier in Afghanistan](#).

A third front, the CIA-led undeclared war in Pakistan, is escalating. [Drone attacks have increased](#) from 35 in 2008 to 124 in 2010. They killed 1,184 people in 2010, creating increasing hatred and new enemies for the United States. Pakistan has also become an area to attack the supply lines to troops in Afghanistan. As a nuclear-armed state the stakes in Pakistan are very high [and its stability is becoming more fragile](#) in part due to these U.S. policies.

The special relationship with Israel continues to undermine the reputation of the U.S. in the region. Israel has continued to build illegal settlements, the illegal separation wall and Israeli only roads on Palestinian land all of which make a viable Palestinian state more difficult to achieve. [Recently released documents](#) showed Israel as inflexible in peace negotiations, while the Palestinians were will to compromise on almost every important issue. Israel's brutal attack on Lebanon, which the U.S. failed to criticize, has strengthened Hezbollah. Democracy brought Hamas to power in response to Israeli abuse, PLO corruption and U.S. intransigence.

These are some recent examples, but the mistaken policies in the region are long term dating back to the 1953 coup in Iran removing elected Prime Minister Mohammad Mosaddegh with disastrous consequences. The attack on the World Trade Center should have been a wake-up call that led to a re-examination of Middle East policy. The U.S. was attacked because of U.S. policy in the region especially on Palestine-Israel, U.S. military bases in the region and support of autocrats. Much of the energy for al Qaeda came out of the prisons of Hosni Mubarak where torture is all too common. [Ayman al-Zawahiri](#), a medical doctor who is Osama bin Laden's closest adviser and often described as the brains of al Qaeda, was tortured in Mubarak's jails and left determined to destroy the United States for keeping Mubarak in power. And, the alleged 9/11 mastermind Mohammed Atta, an Egyptian engineer who was radicalized because of Mubarak's domestic policies.

These mistakes have been costly not only in lives but in treasure. Hundreds of billions have been spent on war and trillions will be spent taking care of the injured. Israel and Egypt are the two largest recipients of U.S. foreign aid, each receiving billions annually. Egypt has received [more than \\$50 billion](#) in aid, mostly military support, since the Camp David's accords. The U.S. provides Israel [with 20% of its military budget](#). And, the wars in Iraq, Afghanistan and Pakistan are bleeding the U.S. treasury at a time when the nation is in economic collapse and austerity measures are creating hardship across the nation.

The fall of Mubarak could be the beginning of massive change across the region. Tunisia has revolted and replaced its government. The government of Jordan has been replaced. The president of Yemen has announced he will not seek another term, nor will his son run for office. The people of the region are on the edge of massive change that will further undermine U.S. interests unless the mistakes of U.S. policy are acknowledged and Obama leads transformational change.

Egypt is one example among many of the U.S. being on the wrong side. Giving billions of dollars and selling sophisticated weapons to the regime of Hosni Mubarak, despite his abusive, autocratic rule of Egypt, is now coming back to haunt America. Tear gas canisters with “Made in the USA” printed on them and U.S.-made jets flying overhead to intimidate Egyptians all demonstrate the mistakes of U.S. foreign policy under multiple presidents.

Thus far, the United States is denying the reality of a failed policy. When [WikiLeaks documents](#) showed the abuse and crimes of U.S. wars as well as the corruption of diplomacy the reaction was to find some way to prosecute Julian Assange and to mistreat PFC [Bradley Manning](#), the alleged leaker, by putting him in pre-trial solitary-like confinement. [The WikiLeaks documents show](#) the U.S. spying on allies, bribing and threatening them, supporting coups against democratically elected officials, allying with dictators and royalists, looking the other way when governments the U.S. put in power tortures civilians and U.S. troops killing civilians for no good reason. With these documents available in the media and on the web President Obama can no longer deny reality and retain credibility.

President Obama’s credibility is also on the line in the Arab world. On June 4, 2009 President Obama gave a speech to the Muslim and Arab world, ironically from Cairo calling for [“A New Beginning.”](#) Mohamed ElBaradei is already calling Obama administration comments on Mubarak a [“farce”](#) and urged President Obama to take more forceful action or it will cost the United States [“whatever is left” of its credibility.](#) President Obama promised the Muslim and Arab world that he would speak the truth:

“As the Holy Koran tells us, ‘Be conscious of God and speak always the truth.’ That is what I will try to do – to speak the truth as best I can, humbled by the task before us, and firm in my belief that the interests we share as human beings are far more powerful than the forces that drive us apart.”

The time has come to speak the truth about Hosni Mubarak. He needs to publicly tell Mubarak to step down, urge a truly democratic process to replace him and the Parliament and stop U.S. foreign aid until he does. President Obama’s failure to forcefully act at this historic juncture will lead him to the mistake he acknowledged could be easily made:

“Words alone cannot meet the needs of our people. These needs will be met only if we act boldly in the years ahead; and if we understand that the challenges we face are shared, and our failure to meet them will hurt us all.”

This is the time to act to get the United States on the right side of history and begin to make up for decades of mistaken foreign policy in the region for, as he said, “whatever we think of the past, we must not be prisoners of it.”

In urging the exit of Mubarak, President Obama can remind the people of Egypt and the world of his words in Cairo about the human yearning for real democracy:

“I do have an unyielding belief that all people yearn for certain things: the ability to speak your mind and have a say in how you are governed; confidence in the rule of law and the equal administration of justice; government that is transparent and doesn’t steal from the people; the freedom to live as you choose. Those are not just American ideas, they are human rights, and that is why we will support them everywhere.”

In acknowledging this President Obama can also point to those who want to see security and stability because we all know that democracies are “ultimately more stable, successful and secure.”

Opposing Mubarak will not be enough. The U.S. is [likely to see an Islamist leaning government in Egypt](#) unless broader changes are made in U.S. policy in the region. In particular, the U.S. relationship with Israel must be radically altered. Failure to face this reality virtually ensures Arab countries that will be hostile to the United States.

President Obama, I quote your words back to you because in your Cairo speech you described some high ideals that are now achievable because: “We have the power to make the world we seek, but only if we have the courage to make a new beginning.” The time is now to make that new beginning.